

Greater Bel Air Community Area

Community Character

The Greater Bel Air Community Area is defined as the Town of Bel Air and surrounding suburbs. As development has moved outward from Bel Air, the character of the area has gradually changed from the separate rural communities of Vale, Bynum, and Fountain Green to a more evenly dispersed suburban community. From a geographic standpoint, the Greater Bel Air community surrounds municipal Bel Air, with its outward boundaries being generally the East/West Highway (MD Route 23) to the north, Fountain Green Road (MD Route 543) to the east, Plumtree Road to the south, and Winters Run to the west.

The Bel Air Community Area lies within the Winter's Run and Bynum Run watersheds, which drain to the Bush River. Due to the rapid urbanization in these watersheds over the last couple of decades, increased sediment and nutrient loads have not only impacted local streams, but also the Bush River. The Bush River Watershed Management Plan, completed by the County in 2003, identified much of the area within the Bel Air Community Area as impacted, and recommends stormwater retrofits, citizen education on watershed stewardship, stream clean-ups, and preservation of existing contiguous forest as a means to improve the watershed.

The character of the Greater Bel Air Community Area has been influenced by the history and growth of the Town of Bel Air. It is difficult to describe the community area without an investigation of the Town itself. Bel Air was settled in the Piedmont hills of Harford County on the northern portion of the drainage divide between the Winter's Run and Bynum Run watersheds. The area for the Town, originally called Scott's Old Fields, was laid out in 1780 as documented by C. Milton Wright in "Our Harford Heritage". The original Town consisted of 42 lots with two later added for a courthouse and other public buildings. Though incorporated in 1874, the Town had been designated as the County Seat in 1782, which to this day established this location as the Seat of County Government and a focal point for residents, goods, and services.

From the 1880's until the 1950's, the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad served as the chief means of delivering products of the farm and industries from the rural portions of Harford, Baltimore, and York Counties to the markets of Baltimore and the City of York. This community was no exception and the railroad made stops at Vale and Bynum, and maintained a primary station in Bel Air. Milk, slate, green marble, lumber, and gravel were some of the freight shipped from the rural area, and the railroad served as a commuter line to countless passengers until 1954. As many of the rural industries ceased operation, and competition with good roads and automobiles became too great, the railroad ceased operation altogether in 1959.

Based on the 2000 Census, the Greater Bel Air area has a population of 46,797 which is 21.4% of the County's population (Figure 45). Between 1990 and 2000, the population of the Greater Bel Air area increased by 37.9%. While the number of persons between the ages of 20 and 34 living in the Greater Bel Air area decreased by 9.4% (from 8,146 to 7,380), other age groups grew in size. The number of people age five to 19 has increased by 36.3% (from 7,062 to 11,077), accounting for

23.7% of the Greater Bel Air Area's population. The age group between the ages of 50 and 64 years showed the highest population growth with an 80% increase (2,498 to 4,494).

Greater Bel Air Demographic Profile: 1990 - 2000

	1990	2000	Percent Change
Total Population	33,946	46,797	37.86%
Total Households	12,190	17,183	40.96%
Median Household Income (in current \$)	\$47,536	\$63,219	32.99%
Employment	12,277	21,219	72.84%
Population By Race / Hispanic Origin			
White	32,630	44,039	34.96%
Black	707	1,305	84.58%
American Indian/Alaska Native	44	64	45.45%
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	498	842	69.08%
Other	77	158	105.19%
Population of 2 or more Races	NA	389	NA
Hispanic Population	369	571	54.74%

Figure 45

Throughout the County, household income was up 37%. The median household income for this area grew 33% in the last decade from \$47,536 to \$63,219. Households in this community earning over \$100,000 a year increased by 312%, while households earning less than \$50,000 a year decreased by less than 1%. Total employment in this area increased by 73% - from 12,277 to 21,219.

As demographics indicate, there is an increased demand for senior housing and senior related services in Harford County. The Bel Air area is home to a number of senior housing communities offering a range of living arrangements and care levels. Located off of Atwood Drive, the William N. McFaul Activities Center, which opened in 2002, provides a place for seniors to interact and remain active.

The transportation network for the community area is complex with Bel Air serving as the hub for many of the County's primary roads including Bel Air Road (U.S. Route 1), Churchville Road (MD Route 22), and MD Route 23. The most heavily traveled road within the community area, MD Route 24, is one of the County's major arteries traversing north/south from I-95, through Bel Air to the Mason-Dixon Line. From Bel Air south this artery serves as a direct connection to I-95, and from Bel Air north it provides access to York County, Pennsylvania. In either direction, MD Route 24 provides commuter access to the employment centers of Bel Air and Baltimore.

The community is served by several elementary schools -- Bel Air, Forest Lake, Homestead-Wakefield, Prospect Mill, Hickory, and Ring Factory; two middle schools -- Bel Air and Southampton; and Bel Air and C. Milton Wright high schools. Based on the October 2003 amendment to the Annual Growth Report, all schools are operating at below the APF standards for capacity except Bel Air High School.

The Bel Air branch of the Harford County Public Library system serves as the system's main library and is also the busiest. A post office, numerous churches, public transit, water and sewer, and entertainment facilities serve the community. Harford County Government's Administrative Offices are headquartered in downtown Bel Air along with the County Health Department, the Board of Education, the State's Mary Risteau Multi Purpose Center, and the Sheriff's Office. In addition, a police department of over 30 officers serves the Town of Bel Air. The Bel Air Volunteer Fire Company, located on Hickory Avenue, has been designed with state of the art training facilities, operations offices, and administrative offices.

The Greater Bel Air Community Area also has a significant amount of open space. County and municipal parks, including the Equestrian Center, are located in this area, and several farms in the community area are protected with preservation easements. The Lyn Staci Getz Creative Playground is located on MD Route 24 and serves both the Bel Air and Abingdon communities. This park, similar to the play area at Rockfield Creative Playground, gives children a safe place to play and interact.

In 1999, the first phase of the Ma and Pa trail was completed in Heavenly Waters Park. This trail network allows people to enjoy a dedicated walkway, separate from vehicular traffic. The trail extends from Tollgate Road to Main Street in Bel Air. The second phase of the trail, located in Forest Hill, extends from the Blake's Venture Park to Friends Park. Plans and land acquisition are underway to connect two segments through Bel Air. Also, a two-mile extension of the trail from the Tollgate Road terminus to the Edgeley Grove Farm is planned for 2004-2005.

In 1996, the Town of Bel Air adopted three overlay districts. The districts are the Transition, Town Center and Route 24 Corridor Overlay Districts. These districts introduced additional land use controls to protect the character of the Town, thereby affecting the character of the Greater Bel Air Community area. The Transition Overlay District protects existing and established residential communities from the impacts of high intensity development. The Town Center Overlay District provides development guidance for issues like compatibility, preservation of a sense of place, site design and placement of buildings. The Route 24 Corridor Overlay District protects the appearance of the entrance to the Bel Air area, assuring that "gateway" development is sensitive to the goals and standards set by the community and Town of Bel Air. In 1999, the Town expanded its overlay districts by adopting a U.S. Route 1 Overlay District, which was followed by the adoption of a Gateway Overlay District in 2003.

This once rural area has grown over the past decade. This is due to many factors, including proximity to I-95, sense of safety within neighborhoods, wide variety of shopping and dining opportunities, good recreational areas, sense of historic integrity, and a feeling that each neighborhood contributes to a sense of community. The increase in population, coupled with a demand for convenient commercial and retail opportunities, has put pressure on public facilities and services to keep pace with growth. Many of the facilities that are struggling to keep pace are also the most visible to the community including schools, roads, intersections, and open land.

As the Bel Air Community Area has grown, the Town of Bel Air has remained the central location in terms of services, while the surrounding community has grown through conversion of agricultural parcels to residential use. This has resulted in individual neighborhoods connected only by the

commonality of the Town as a service hub. The community area, however, is undergoing a transition. As infill development occurs on many of the undeveloped parcels, momentum is building toward development of a Greater Bel Air community. Strong community concern attests to a healthy community economy and a stable residential population. Additionally, community participation and activism demonstrate interest in the future of the community and endorse a commitment to responsible growth with the goal of transitioning discrete neighborhoods into a Greater Bel Air community.

Plan for the Area

The original agricultural and village areas that historically surrounded Bel Air have, over time, been converted to neighborhoods as residents took advantage of the employment opportunities within Bel Air, Aberdeen Proving Ground, and the Baltimore metropolitan region. Commercial markets materialized as the residential population grew, and both independent and chain retail stores were established. Future growth within the community area will hinge on its status as an attractive suburban residential destination within the Baltimore region in contrast to a growth area based on employment opportunities within the Town and environs. Demographic data suggests that the community is growing quickly and the County should look carefully at impacts development will have on public facilities - notably the public schools and the inventory of adult communities. The plan for the area strives to build continuity between the Town and the surrounding community. Residential and commercial areas should effectively serve the community while maintaining neighborhood identity and scale.

The Town of Bel Air still serves as the focal point for the area. Therefore, it is important that the State, County and Town coordinate planning efforts. The Town of Bel Air recently updated its Comprehensive Plan and adopted a revised Zoning Code in 2003. As part of this process, significant community participation from the Town community, County and State agencies and surrounding communities was encouraged.

Many of the major issues explored in the Bel Air Comprehensive Plan are applicable to the larger Bel Air Community Area including better traffic flow while providing better access to Town businesses. The Town of Bel Air, in cooperation with Harford County Government and the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) is working to complete a proposed comprehensive "Main Street" improvement for the center of Bel Air. This improvement and the recently completed improvements to Bond Street will provide pedestrians a friendlier town center by minimizing automobile speeds while creating a safer, more pleasant streetscape environment. Traffic movement must be facilitated by improving the roads necessary to give access to commercial areas. Smaller roads should be maintained as connections between neighborhoods, the Town, and the surrounding community.

Improved access to Bel Air should also include additional public transportation. This will help reduce the number of cars on the road and can provide a much needed service to area citizens. Existing service should be expanded to include longer running bus schedules and additional stops. Additional service can be targeted to older, mature neighborhoods providing much needed service to senior citizens of the Bel Air area.

The County, State and Town of Bel Air are working together to alleviate traffic congestion problems in and around Bel Air. Planned solutions include improvements to Moore's Mill Road, U.S. Route 1 and MD Route 24 intersections. The project planning of the U.S. 1 Bypass improvements has been completed. Efforts to obtain funding for this project are underway and should be encouraged.

Most of the remaining development potential within the community area will be infill as few undeveloped parcels remain. New growth shall be environmentally sound and paced with the adequacy of public facilities and services. Also, new residential growth shall unite existing neighborhoods and complement existing linkages between the Town and surrounding neighborhoods within the Community Area. Areas for recreation and open space shall be identified on an individual neighborhood basis, making sure they also contribute to the needs of the entire community. Transportation linkages shall promote connections between neighborhoods in the community, and public transportation shall be encouraged and promoted wherever feasible.

The community is also concerned about the capacity of school facilities to absorb additional growth. The development of the new middle/high school complex at Patterson Mill along with the modernization of Bel Air High School will help to address this concern. Additional revenue sources should also be investigated and implemented to help provide needed educational facilities.

Additional recreational facilities are planned for the Greater Bel Air area. These include Edgeley Grove, Prospect Mill Park and Patterson Mill Park. Located near the equestrian center, Edgeley Grove's future development will include a natural amphitheater, ball fields and trail connections. Prospect Mill Park will serve the Bel Air and Forest Hill Community Areas, more specifically the Fountain Green and Hickory areas, and will help to address active open space needs. Patterson Mill Park will have recreational facilities that serve both the new middle/high school complex and the community.

Within the Greater Bel Air Community Area, commercial uses shall be directed toward the Town of Bel Air and the designated Neighborhood and Community Centers. This will help to maintain the viability of Bel Air as a center for services, while also protecting neighborhood identity. Major commercial growth should be directed away from the transportation links of MD Route 543 between Bel Air and Fountain Green and MD Route 24 between Bel Air and Forest Hill. Along MD Route 22 between Bel Air and Churchville, commercial uses shall be directed to the designated Neighborhood Centers.

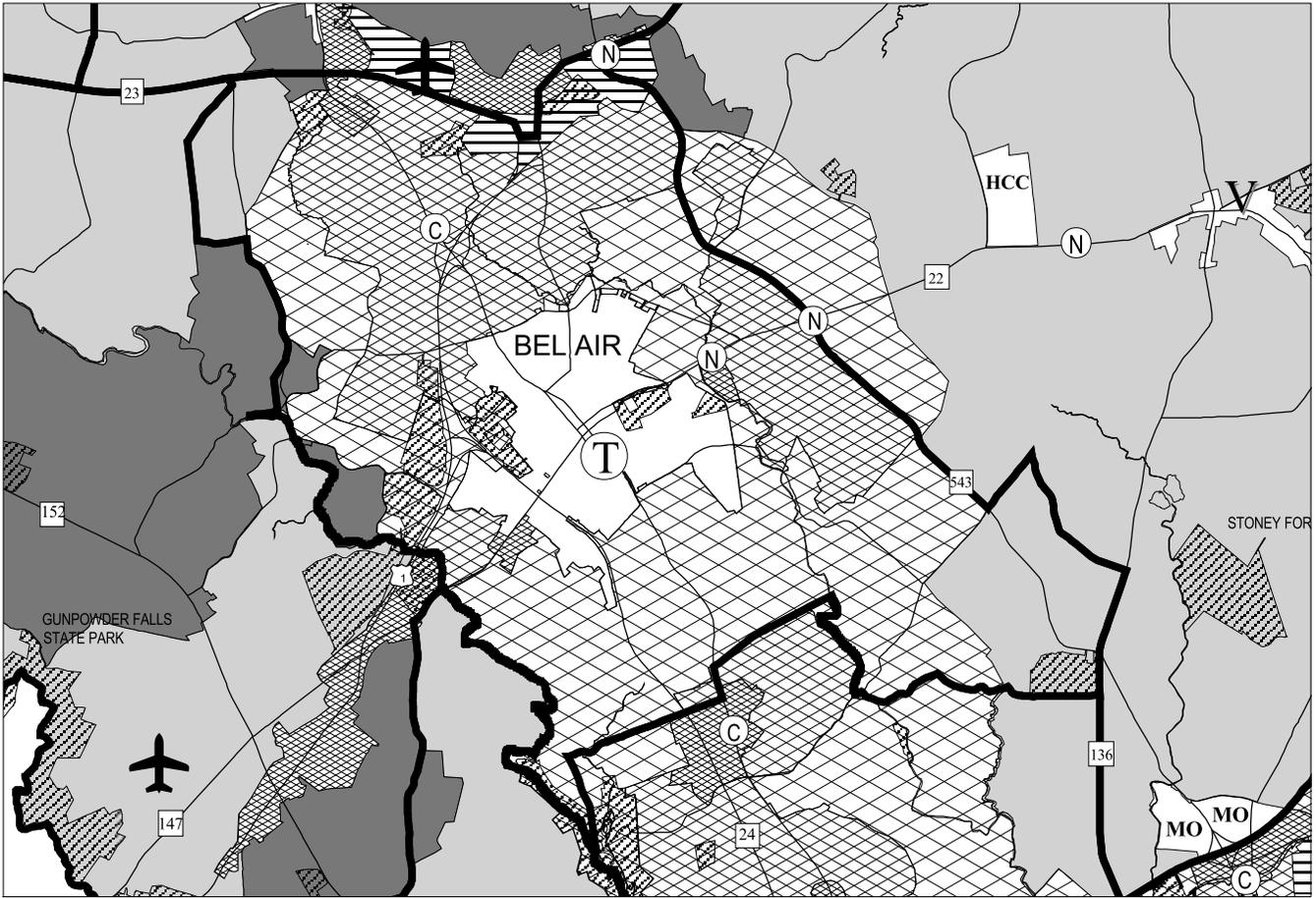
The intersection of Red Pump Road/Bynum Road and Rock Spring Road (MD Route 24), continues to remain a viable Community Center. The Rock Spring Shopping Center has been redeveloped to accommodate new retailers and a new anchor business. The continued redevelopment of older commercial areas at the intersection of MD Route 24 and Red Pump Road will help to discourage further development between this intersection and Forest Hill, thus providing a transition between the Town and the rural area.

The strategy in designating this intersection as a Community Center is to direct new commercial/retail uses to an area of similar uses that have traditionally served, and could continue to serve, the growing residential population in this portion of the community area. The Community Center shall continue to serve this function by focusing new community scale commercial/retail

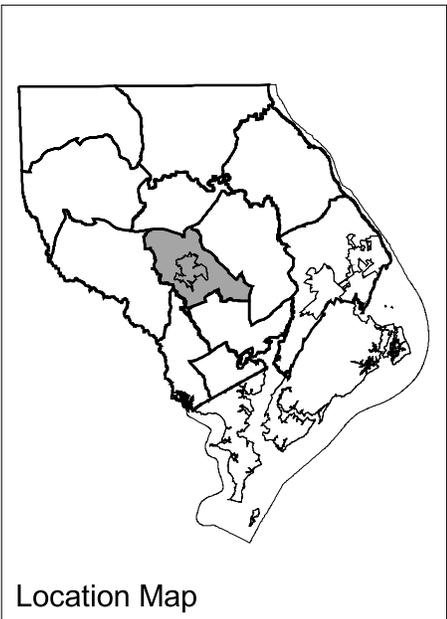
development around this intersection rather than providing opportunities for strip development along the length of Rock Spring Road.

Studies indicate that there is sufficient commercially zoned land to meet the immediate and foreseeable retail and service needs of the County. No additional commercial rezoning will be supported within the Greater Bel Air Community Area unless further analysis determines that there is a need for additional commercial land. Any additional zoning changes will also be subject to a technical analysis to ensure that the proposed change will not generate adverse impacts to the community.

Economic development initiatives will help to promote redevelopment in older areas and adaptive reuse of historic structures within the community area. Additionally, economic incentives shall encourage tourism and cultural experiences, and be coordinated between the community area and the Town of Bel Air.



Greater Bel Air Community Area



- Agricultural
- Rural Residential
- Low Intensity
- Medium Intensity
- High Intensity
- Industrial/Employment
- State and County Parks (over 10 acres)
- MO** Mixed Office
- Community Area Boundary
- Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Boundary
- N** Neighborhood Center
- C** Community Center
- V** Rural Village
- T** Town Center
- Airport
- HCC** Harford Community College
- HEAT** Higher Education Applied Technology



Figure 46 □

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